

Was meeting appropriate for claims? Politicians in Orange give answers

By Chris Sykes
Staff Writer

After potential City Council candidate Stephanie Blaine asked West Ward Councilman Hassan Abdul-Rasheed if he had a criminal history at a recent Orange City Council meeting, a few people expressed concerns about using the meeting to address the issue.

When Blaine spoke at the Jan. 17 meeting, she held a copy of a 2006 letter in which an attorney asked for a meeting with City Clerk Dwight Mitchell. The attorney claimed Abdul-Rasheed had twice been convicted of felonies prior to taking office in 2006.

Blaine referred to the letter, then asked Abdul-Rasheed if the information was correct. The councilman objected to the question.

In an interview with the *Record-Transcript*, Abdul-Rasheed said the claims were presented in Superior Court after the 2006 election and rejected.

Some people close to Orange politics have questioned the timing and place of Blaine's questioning. Former Assemblyman Willis Edwards, who is supporting Legislative Research Officer Dwayne Warren in his bid to unseat Mayor Eldridge Hawkins Jr. in the May 8 election, said they believed the meeting was not the correct forum.

Council President Tency Eason agreed.

"I made a statement that night when Miss Blaine first brought the issue up at the council meeting, 'Why now?'" said Eason. "Everybody knew about Hassan Abdul-Rasheed's past way back when he first ran for office; nobody did anything about it then. So why would they question it now?"

Eason added she agreed with Edwards that a coun-

cil meeting was not the correct place for Blaine to air the results of her Open Public Records Act investigation into Abdul-Rasheed.

"There was nothing the public could do about it because only the prosecutor's office or the attorney general have the power to investigate him to find out if he did anything wrong when he filed to run for office the first time," Eason said. "If she felt that strongly about it, she could have sent it to the prosecutor herself. I feel that it was a personal attack."

Edwards agreed with Eason; however, he directed the blame for Blaine's actions at Hawkins.

"This is just another example of the mayor's retribution to people who disagree with him," Edwards said. "When good people start to speak out, that's when the mayor goes on the attack."

Hawkins denied having anything to do with Blaine's decision to speak at the meeting.

"I wasn't even there in the council chamber when this document was read, but I find it very amusing that people are blaming me," Hawkins said. "They can spin it however they want about Hassan Abdul-Rasheed or Craig Miller, but he did what he did."

Abdul-Rasheed's birth name was Craig Miller.

Former Councilman William Lewis said there were no problems with the subject being brought to the floor during the meeting.

Lewis said Eason was correct; questions about Abdul-Rasheed should have been referred to county and state authorities to investigate. Hawkins agreed and said that's what his administration did.

Managing Editor John Zucal contributed to this article.